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A STUDY OF 12 WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS MEASURED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EXTENT OF INNOVATIVENESS EXHIBITED IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE DEGREE OF CONSENSUS OF EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD ROLE WITHIN AND BETWEEN GROUPS OF CITIZENS, TEACHERS, ELECTED MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS, AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS. MEASURES OF INNOVATIVENESS INCLUDED (1) NUMBER OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS ADOPTED, (2) RELATIVE EARLINESS OF SUCH ADOPTIONS, AND (3) RATE OF SPREAD OF THE INNOVATIONS WITHIN THE DISTRICT. INTERVIEWS TO DETERMINE CONSENSUS WERE MADE OF RANDOM SAMPLES OF THE FOLLOWING GROUPS--1794 CITIZENS, 240 TEACHERS, 183 ELECTED OFFICIALS, 90 BOARD MEMBERS, AND 12 SUPERINTENDENTS. INTERVIEWS TO DETERMINE INNOVATIVENESS WERE HELD JOINTLY WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS AND ANOTHER ADMINISTRATOR. ALTHOUGH NO DATA ARE INCLUDED, GENERAL SUPPORT AND REJECTION ARE REPORTED FOR EIGHT INTERRELATED HYPOTHESES. THE STUDY CONCLUDES THAT A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S INNOVATIVENESS IS POSITIVELY RELATED TO THE AMOUNT OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN CITIZENS AND TEACHERS REGARDING THEIR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD ROLE. DISTRICTS WITH HIGH AGREEMENT BETWEEN EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL SEGMENTS WILL ADOPT MORE INNOVATIONS AT AN EARLIER DATE THAN DISTRICTS LACKING THIS AGREEMENT. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 18, 1967). (JK)

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SCHOOL DISTRICT INNOVATIVENESS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD ROLE

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The purpose of this investigation was to examine the relationships of the degree of consensus of expectations for the school board role within and between groups of citizens, teachers, elected municipal officials, and school board members to the extent of innovativeness exhibited in school districts. Measures of innovativeness used were (1) the number of educational practices, considered to be innovative, which were adopted, (2) the relative earliness of adoption of said practices, and (3) the rate of spread of the educational practices within a district after the practices were initially adopted.

The present study was done in conjunction with the United States Office of Education Cooperative Research Project No. 2371 entitled "The School Board As An Agency for Resolving Conflict." The project, conducted by The University of Wisconsin, Department of Educational Administration, had as its central thesis the degree of consensus in expectations for the school board role bears a systematic and cogent relationship to (1) change in level of local financial support for the schools and (2) change in the nature of allocations to categories within the budget.

The present investigation was based upon an application of social systems theory to the school organization; the school board was viewed as an interstitial body between the managerial system-level and the community

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system-level. The focus was the expectations for the school board role held by members within the school organization, i.e., the teachers, the school board members themselves, and two groups outside the school organization, citizens and elected officials. The basic question is whether or not it makes a difference in educational outcomes or decisions if there is agreement among the role expectations for the school board role held by groups which are thought to exert pressure on the school board members.

The major hypotheses investigated were tested in the following null form.

1. There is no significant difference in the degree of innovativeness in school districts of high and low consensus in expectations for the school board role.

2. There is no significant difference in the earliness of adoption of innovations in school districts of high and low consensus in expectations for the school board role.

3. There is no significant difference in the rate of diffusion of innovations within the school district in school districts of high and low consensus in expectations for the school board role.

In each major hypothesis the consensus <u>within</u> (1) the citizen group, (2) the school board, (3) the professional staff, and (4) a group of elected officials was considered as well as the consensus <u>between</u> (5) the citizens and the professional staff, (6) the citizens and the school board, (7) the professional staff and the school board, and (8) the elected officials and the school board. In addition to the major hypotheses, the relationships of the extent of innovativeness to certain ancillary data regarding the school district, the superintendent, and the adoption procedures were examined.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The population of this study was the twelve school districts included in Project No. 2371. The districts were selected from approximately 100 Wisconsin school districts having a kindergarten through grade twelve

school organization during the 1963-64 school year. Criteria used to select the school districts included (1) the size of the school district as measured by average daily membership, (2) the wealth of the district as measured by the equalized valuation per pupil in average daily membership, (3) the ratio of non-public school enrollment to the total school district enrollment, (4) the type of fiscal control, that is, independent of or dependent upon a municipal government body for approval of the school budget, and (5) the degree of intensity of community issues as rated by three raters, two from the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction and one from the University of Wisconsin School of Education Cooperative Educational Research Service. The twelve districts were selected so that the greatest possible balance of the selection criteria would be achieved. Seventy-one of the seventy-eight possible combinations of criteria have at least one district possessing the particular characteristics.

Within each district, randcm samples of citizens and teachers and the entire populations of school board members, superintendents, and elected municipal officials were interviewed with regard to their expectations for the school board role. Expectations data were gathered by means of interview schedules developed by the project staff. The schedule obtained background information about the respondent; his expectations for the role of the school board concerning the educational program, school plant facilities, staff personnel, pupil personnel, and business management; and ratings of his satisfaction with the board and his ratings of the board's effectiveness. There were 1,794 citizens, 240 teachers, 183 elected officials, ninety board members, and twelve superintendents interviewed for the project.

The responses to each of eighty-four questions used in the measurement of consensus were dichotomized according to whether the response was in

agreement with the idea expressed. A third category was used to include all the responses which were non-committal or in which the position of the respondent was not ascertained. The third category was not considered a meaningful response and was eliminated from the measurement of consensus.

Operationally, consensus would exist in a group when the proportion of the group answering a question in a meaningful way exceeded the upper limit of the confidence interval representing the proportion of the group which could be expected to answer the question this way allowing an equal chance for each meaningful response to be selected and a five per cent chance error. The effect of this procedure was to put each group on an equal basis by keeping the probability of achieving "significant" agreement constant. Indices of consensus within each of the four groups were based upon the number of questions which had a "significant" proportion of the group giving the same response to the question. Using a priori reasoning that it was necessary to have within-group consensus before it was possible to have between-group consensus, the indices of between-group consensus were based on the number of questions on which the two groups had within-group consensus in the same direction. Districts of high and low consensus were identified as those districts whose index was more than one standard deviation above and below the mean of the indices respectively.

Data used in measuring the three aspects of innovativeness were collected through interviews held jointly with the superintendent of schools and another administrator who had served in the school district for at least ten years. Three basic measures of innovativeness were obtained: (1) the degree of innovativeness as measured by the number of innovations adopted by the district, (2) the earliness of adoption of innovations determined by the date of adoption within the time period of the study, i.e.,

from the 1955-56 school year to the 1965-66 school year inclusive, and (3) the rate of diffusion of innovations within the district, a quasi per cent of spread per year based upon the per cent of full potential spread achieved in the first year of adoption, the first two years of adoption, and in the time period since adoption.

To control the differences between innovations derived weights were obtained for each of the sixty-four innovations. These weights were based upon the ratings by a panel of judges, experienced in many facets of educational administration, of the degree to which each innovation possessed the characteristics which Rogers identified as affecting the rate of acceptance of innovations. These characteristics were relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, divisibility, and communicability.

Each major hypothesis was tested eight times -- once for each of the four within-group consensus indices and once for each of the four between-group consensus indices, using analysis of variance and the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the innovativeness measures in districts of high and low consensus in their expectations for the school board role. The alternate hypothesis, if the null hypothesis was rejected, was that there are differences.

In addition to the major hypotheses, the relationships of the innovativeness measures to certain variables, thought to be related to the adoption of innovations, were investigated using product moment correlation procedures. Those variables were grouped as measures of financial support, biographical data pertaining to the superintendent of schools, characteristics of the school system, and certain characteristics of the adoption process as viewed by the administration.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this investigation can be summarized as follows:

1. The null hypothesis of no relationship between the degree of

innovativeness and the degree of consensus between citizens and teachers was rejected. This indicated there is a relationship between the degree of innovativeness, i.e., the number of innovations adopted, and the consensus between citizens and teachers in their expectations for the school board role.

2. The null hypothesis of no relationship between the earliness of adoption of innovations and the consensus between citizens and teachers also was rejected. There is a relationship between the earliness of adoption of innovations and the degree of consensus between citizens and teachers in their expectations for the school board role.

3. The degree of innovativeness, i. e., the number of innovations adopted, was related to the size of the school district as measured by average daily membership.

4. The rate of diffusion of innovations within the school district was positively related to the current operating expenditure per pupil in average daily membership.

5. The rate of diffusion of innovations within the school also was negatively related to the size of the teacher load as measured by the average daily membership per teacher.

6. Analysis of the degree of consensus within and between groups of citizens, teachers, board members, and elected officials indicated that citizens had a greater degree of within-group consensus than did the other groups. The school board, in its position between the external and internal segments of the school organization, had the least amount of within-group consensus with regard to expectations for their role. Teacher groups had the least amount of variation among their within-group consensus indices; this indicated that teacher groups were most alike in the degree of consensus in their expectations for the school board role. Examination of the between-group consensus indices revealed that the board members were more similar to

teacher groups than citizen groups in the degree of consensus in their expectations for the school board role.

7. The areas in which most consensus was found involved questions on business procedures, school sites, and school building construction. Questions which evoked the least consensus pertained to issues such as federal aid to education and transportation of parochial school students. There were few instances where two groups had within-group consensus in opposing directions; these involved whether or not a pupil's I.Q. should be reported to the parents and, secondly, the role of the school board in specific tasks performed in the operation of the district.

8. An analysis of the inter-relationships of the three innovativeness measures revealed that the degree of innovativeness or number of innovations adopted was significantly related to the earliness of adoption score but neither of these aspects were related to the rate of diffusion of the innovations within the district. In fact the correlation coefficients between the rate of diffusion scores and the other innovativeness measures were negative.

9. Questions regarding the procedures used in adopting new practices revealed that about fifty per cent of the adoptions had some administrative officers who provided the major impetus for adoption. Teachers were next, followed by citizens and school board members were a distant fourth in providing the impetus for the adoption of new practices. The board of education was involved in some type of approval action in ninety-five per cent of the adoptions thus indicating the control function of the school board.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The rejection of the two operational hypotheses involving the

consensus between the citizens and teachers and the degree of innovativeness and earliness of adoption scores can be related to the board of education being in a position of potential conflict between the external and internal segments of the school organization. If citizens and teachers are in high agreement with regard to their expectations for the school board role, the conflict potential of this interstitial position is decreased and more attention can be given to the improvement of the operation of the school district. The adoption of new educational practices is but one outcome of a system in dynamic equilibrium. On the other hand if there existed a lack of consensus between citizens and teachers in their expectations for the school board role, the conflict potential of the board's position is increased and fewer innovations adopted and those adopted are initiated at a later date. One interpretation might be that the school board, as a body, is not able to focus upon its role -- perhaps because it is overly concerned with the potential conflict -- or because the expectations which define the role are unclear. If there is a high degree of consensus between citizens and teachers, it could be hypothesized that the expectations for the role of the school board are more apparent to the members of the board; the result is that the board is able to focus on its role -- a role more clearly defined because of the high degree of consensus between the external and internal segments of the organization.

The lack of relationship between the diffusion of innovations within a district to the other innovativeness measures can be explained in the experimental programs used by districts which are more prone to adopt new ideas. The experimental approach, starting with a pilot program, would tend to lower the rate of diffusion within a district score while other districts, not in the vanguard of innovators, may wait until a practice has proven itself to adopt the innovation throughout the district in one move.

In summary, this study revealed that education is a cooperative venture in which the propensity to change -- to adopt new educational practices -- is related to the amount of agreement between citizens and teachers with regard to their expectations for the school board role. The school district which has high agreement between the two groups representing the external and internal segments of the organization will be characterized as one which adopts more of the new educational practices at an earlier date than districts in which this agreement does not exist.